

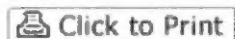
Dcioce [Moderator] 08/01/2009 04:43 PM

I worked with John Stephens manufacturing the Stephens 821B recorder/reproducers from 1978 thru 1982. John was an amazing individual. His relentless pursuit and often times "abstract" approach to music reproduction perfection lead him to design many innovative and great sounding products. From his low wow & flutter and low modulation noise capstan-less transport designs (which so gently handled tape) to the incredible sounding 600 series discrete single ended amplifier modules used in his tape machines and consoles. I asked John once how he came upon the design of his amplifier modules and he told me that in the '60's he considered the circuit designs published by Bell Labs for use with the newly designed transistor to be all wrong. His development work while with JPL had pointed him in a different direction. He had actually designed the amplifiers to mimic the distortion characteristics (and sound reproduction) of the best tube circuits. He said he designed them by ear and then checked them for their operating specs! John was a pioneer in the recording industry, a true genius and a good friend.

Doug Cioce



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John Stephens, 1930-2007

Aug 16, 2007 2:17 PM, By George Petersen

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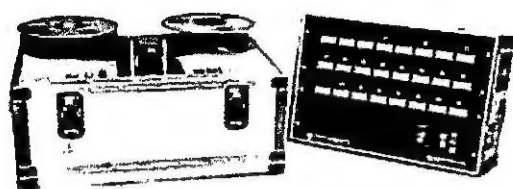
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In the early- to mid-1960s, a young John Stephens was ready to take on the recording world.

Recording innovator John Stephens, founder of Stephens Electronics, died on August 6, at age 76, after a long bout with dementia. Born in Cleveland, Stephens was raised in Burbank, Calif., where he developed an early interest in electronics, learning from his father, an aeronautics engineer and avid amateur radio buff who later became Pacific Director of the FAA. In the post-war era, Stephens joined the Navy, continuing his electronics education and in an era when RF mic systems were almost non-existent he developed wireless microphone systems for troop entertainment.

After his Navy stint, Stephens worked for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, where he was engaged in ways of employing the new-found transistor technology. As the first commercial 8-tracks came to market, Stephens developed and sold improved record amplifiers and later bought transports from 3M, marketing them with his own electronics. Evidently perturbed about some outsider's designs outperforming its stock recorders, 3M stopped selling transports to Stephens, who then began building his own decks.

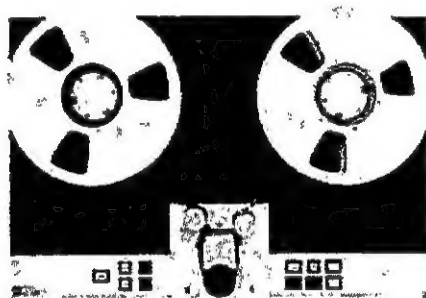


Stephens 821B-104A-24 Track Portable

The portable 24-track?a Stephens innovation.

Even from the start, Stephens recorders combined excellent electronics, superb heads, a rigid 1-inch-thick deck plate and an innovative, highly accurate transport that was extremely gentle on tape. First unveiled by Stephens in 1971, the unique capstanless/pinch rollerless system required only two motors (supply and take-up), with a clever rotating idler that "chopped" the output of an LED into pulses that were compared to a crystal-locked time base for rock-solid servo transport motor control. (For an explanation of the Stephens transport system, [click here](#).)

Offering a modular construction that made servicing simpler (and allowed the creation of custom portable decks housed in roadcases), the Stephens machines also featured an optional battery supply that operated a deck for up to 16 hours from two car batteries. These were employed on countless live music and location film recordings, including classics such as Robert Altman's Nashville.



The Stephens transport was simplicity defined.

At most, Stephens only made a few hundred decks, ranging from 7-inch 2-track machines to 2-inch 40-tracks?another first?and a couple of custom consoles. Stephens was never much on self-promotion, but searching through some of the company's sales documentation and records revealed an impressive client list. Among his recorder customers were Hollywood Sound Recording, A&R Recording, A&M Recording, Ike & Tina Turner, The Village Recorder, Margaritaville, Enactron, Lions Gate Films, Pioneer Japan, Cornerstone Recording, NBC, UCLA, Spectrum Studios, Wayne Cook, Mark Lindsay, Roy Thomas Baker, Atlantic Sound, The Grateful Dead, Criterion Productions, John Farrar, Effanel, American Zoetrope, Secret Sound, Paramount and Circle Sound?among many others. A good number of these machines remain in service today and are still considered by many to be among the finest sounding recorders ever built.

In an era when so much recording gear is built by large corporations, a pioneer and innovator such as John Stephens was truly a one of a kind. His legacy lives on in the tools he built and the multitude of great recordings made on these machines. He will not be forgotten.

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<http://www.mixonline.com/news/john-stephens-obituary-081807/index.html>

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